

The Corner Where Traffic Cop and Fairies Meet

Just a Few Steps from Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street:
 Wonderland, With All Its Miracles



By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

IF you remember Alice (Lewis Carroll's wonderful Alice, I mean) you will recall that in her second marvelous adventure she walked right through a mirror over the mantelpiece into fairyland and the country of Humpty-Dumpty.

That is just what one can do at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, which is, as we all know, right in the very heart of practical, jazzing, money-scrambling little old New York. Only, and still more wonderful to relate, one suddenly disappears through a wall of solid marble into this little kingdom of what Peter Pan called the Never-Never Land, and those who can accomplish this miracle are not only your little believing Alices and Peters but any work-a-day person regardless of age, opinion or previous condition of incertitude about such miracles.

Walking into the Public Library at the Forty-second Street entrance one day and looking immediately down the first marble corridor to the left, I saw many people disappear into the solid white wall as if suddenly dragged in by unseen hands. Investigating, I found a small door set in the wall, and taking the pedal plunge, I was in the children's room, which is situated right at the angle of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue.

The contrast between the rip-roaring movement outside, with the jumble of autos, trolley cars, traffic cops, show windows, and moving care-laden and fashionable throngs and this room is astonishing, and, if one is sentimental and imaginative, almost eerie. Here, in one step from the street, was a transposed world of silent adventure, flower decorated alcoves, fantastically colored panels and plates, and a great many kiddies of all ages, ranging from the tiny tot to boys and girls of 12 and 13 years, bent over books of strange and bloody deeds and fairy stories.

I stuck my head through one of the little windows, and, looking at the big traffic cop mechanically mauling his "Stop" and "Go" sign, wondered what he would have thought if I had gone up to him and asked:

"Can you tell me where Mother Goose, Robin Hood, Cinderella, and Humpty-Dumpty live around here?"

Such a question would have, without doubt, immediately tied up traffic. He probably would have given me a smiling, disdainful "once over," and for answer jerked his thumb in a general southeast-

erly direction toward Centre Islip, L. I., where they cage the "bugs."

Everything in the decorative scheme of the children's room is done to remove the minds of the children as far as possible from the realities of life. On the walls are a series of beautifully painted pictures by Nathaniel C. Wyeth which depict the life of that grand old scamp, Robin Hood, and his doings in Nottingham Forest. We see Robin at work and Robin at play—his work consisting of holding up the solid landed gentry of England and his play running to beer and skittles, and all in company with his partners, merry of face and thick in the girth.

There is also a series of paintings, depicting incidents from Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Black Arrow." In glass cases around the walls are de luxe editions of famous fairy stories in French and English, the pages displaying marvelously beautiful illustrations.

On the afternoon in which I made my incursion into this child's world many little noses were pressed against the cases and much whispering was going on as to the strange doings in this silent world beyond the glass, but which was a tremendously live world to these little children.

The library has its fairy godmother, too, (what is fairyland without a god-

mother?) A lady with silver hair and all the other accoutrements of the honest-to-fairy godmother comes into this room each week and, gathering the little ones around her in the cushioned alcoves, spins out fairy stories by the hour to these wide-eyed and open-mouthed youngsters. Her name and position in life—sh-h-h!—remain a dead secret.

By no amount of begging and cajoling could the reporter discover who she was. To give her name, said one of the female attendants in the kiddies' room, would destroy the glamour of her coming and going. She is known to the children simply as "The Fairy Godmother," and it is a great hour for them when she appears suddenly through the marble wall, her eye beaming with wild myths and the latest news from Fairyville.

The Fairy Godmother's store of fairy knowledge is evidently inexhaustible. She often invents as she goes along, and to her and the children gathered around her in this momentous hour the outer world does not exist.

"The Fairy Godmother was here yesterday," said a golden-haired, blue-eyed girl of about seven years to me, "and she knows where Cinderella is."

"And where is the godmother today?" I asked little blue eyes.

"She said she was going to visit the Golden-Haired Prince and see whether he wouldn't rescue the sister of little Red Riding Hood, who, you know, is locked in the castle of that awful Bluebeard man."

And she nodded her head significantly at me, as much as to say:

"You just wait and see! The Fairy Godmother will get her out all right."

That the Fairy Godmother had mixed up her stories sadly did not mean anything at all to my little informant. What's a mixed fairy story among children?

I went back into the dazzling light of Fifth Avenue, but the flash from the wheels and the sparkle on the cop's badge and the long array of buildings stretching either way on the avenue seemed to me unreal and of no importance, and that room in the library that I had just left behind was the real thing, and the Fairy Godmother and the little heads concentrated on another world seemed to contain the thing we are all seeking.

"Watch yer step, boob!" bawled a chauffeur at my head as I crossed the street.

It doesn't do to pipe-dream when you leave that room!